

TERMS OF APPRECIATION

Tea Basics

There are some very useful tea terms that tea lovers use to communicate aspects of mouthfeel. In looking for these sensations, you will improve your sensitivity. Of course, such terms can also be misleading if you focus on their meaning rather than trying to feel the actual sensation in the mouth. It is enough that you feel something, in other words. You don't need to be able to articulate it, just understand the basics of what you are feeling for now. These terms will help you explore mouthfeel:

- 1) Kou Gan (口感):** This translates as “mouthfeel”. It refers to any of the sensations we experience when drinking tea. It points more to sensation than flavor, and most all the following terms are parts of “kou gan”.
- 2) Gan (甘) /Hui Gan (回甘):** “Gan” is a coolness or minty-ness that fills up the mouth, a bit like breathing outside on a very cold winter day. (This is a different “gan, 甘” than the “gan, 感” in “kou gan”, discussed above. The same word with different tones occurs in tonal languages, to the confusion of us foreigners.) It also sometimes refers to sweetness with a fragrance that travels on the breath—cooling the mouth in this way. We say a tea has “gan” when it stimulates the mouth with such a freshness. With “hui” there is a “remembrance”, borrowing from the literary term “to reflect”. This means the sweetness rises up from the throat after the tea is swallowed. It lingers, in other words.
- 3) Hui Tian (回甜):** This term is a clarification or distinction made to separate the cool, freshness of “hui gan” from a sweet fragrance arising from the throat. When the sensation is accompanied with a predominate sweetness, we call it “hui tian”.
- 4) Nai Pao (耐泡):** This literally translates as “patience”. It refers to how long a tea can be steeped; how many infusions can be had from the leaves, in other words.
- 5) Sheng Jin (生津):** This refers to a pleasant moistness caused by a tea. It means the tea causes salivation from under the tongue, and sometimes the sides of the mouth by the cheeks. It also coats the mouth, like oil or milk.
- 6) Ruan (軟):** This is the ‘smoothness’ of the tea. A good tea has the texture of silk. It seems as if all the atoms in the liquor are in the right place, coordinated and rounded. The tea liquor all stays together and is almost oily or gelatinous. It all slides down the throat together, smoothly. Improperly prepared teas are rough, as if the atoms are jagged, misplaced and scratchy.
- 7) Feng Fu (豐富):** In tea tasting, this means “full-bodied”. It means the tea is rich and complex, deep and subtle. The best teas have sensations, aromas and flavors that lead you onward—drinking them for years, you still discover new and amazing sensations. The best works of art are always like this.
- 8) Cha Yun (茶韻):** This is a very elusive term. “Yun” literally means “to rhyme”; and “cha” is of course “tea”. When a tea has ‘rhyme’, it means it is well-rounded. A tea with “cha yun” transforms in the way the best teas do. A tea with “yun” splashes up to the upper palate, rolls down the throat naturally and smoothly, coats the mouth and throat, causes salivation and “gan”. All the aspects of such a tea are comfortable and fit together the way lines of poetry do. Such a tea is, itself, a poem.

